RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
AND
SCOTTISH CHURCH LIFE
IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

WALTER ROSS TAYLOR, D.D.

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Addresses

TO THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

24TH MAY TO 5TH JUNE, 1900

BY

WALTER ROSS TAYLOR, D.D.

MODERATOR

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE First and Third of the Addresses in this Pamphlet were given from the Chair of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland at its recent meeting—the one at the Opening, and the other at the Close of the Assembly's proceedings. They are issued in separate form out of deference to a frequently expressed wish. The Second of the three was delivered when, as Convener of the Sustentation Fund Committee, I submitted the Committee's Report for the year ; and it is issued along with the others, both because it deals with a marked feature in the Church life of the Century, and because the Assembly ordered its publication.

W. R. T.

GLASGOW, *July*, 1900.

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OPENING ADDRESS

FATHERS AND BRETHREN, since my nomination to this chair, my feelings have been those of equal surprise and gratitude. There hangs in my study a copy of D. O. Hill's well-known picture of the first General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, and as from time to time I looked into the faces of the illustrious fathers who, in succession to Thomas Chalmers, occupied the Moderator's chair, I have increasingly wondered at the generosity of your present choice. Nor is this feeling lessened as I think of the honoured brethren who have more recently presided here. Last year, for example, nothing could have been more fitting than to summon to this seat the heroic son of the Church,* who, through his courage, his administrative ability, and his missionary devotion, has carved his name across Africa alongside that of David Livingstone. In the present instance, however, while I recognise your desire to do honour to the city of Glasgow, and, in particular, to a public-spirited congregation, your action is to my mind a remarkable example of how a Church, through largeness of heart, may allow appreciation of service to pass far beyond the

* Rev. James Stewart, M.D., D.D., Lovedale, Africa.

value of the service received. This being my profound feeling, I thank you with all the deeper gratitude for so high a mark of regard; and I rely with confidence on your extending to me the same kindness in my endeavour to discharge the duties of a new position.

A Transition Year.—There are two outstanding circumstances which naturally suggest the line of remark to be followed in addresses from the chair at the present Assembly. In this year of our Lord 1900 we stand in the transition year between two centuries. Very probably members of the House are not unanimous as to what the century is in which we now live; but all will agree that we have reached the period when the nineteenth century either has closed or is in course of closing. In either case, we are face to face with the end of a century. Then, too, there is the prospect that the present will be a transition year for our Church—the year, let us hope, in which it will glide into the fresh life and fuller energy of a United Free Church, as smoothly, with as little sense of shock, and with as complete absence of loss, as when the old life of the nineteenth century passes imperceptibly into the new life of the twentieth. Accordingly, the position both of the century and of the Church invites us to make our glances mainly retrospective, and that with a view to our gleaning a few of the many lessons which the past affords for our present and future guidance.

Spirit of Progress.—In the present address, then, I shall venture to make a few remarks on some of the influences which, in the course of the nineteenth century, have been brought to bear on religious thought; on a subsequent occasion an opportunity will present itself for looking back on the history of our characteristic Free Church Fund; and, in a closing address, I hope to refer to some of the lessons bearing on the life and work of our Scottish Churches, which

may be gathered from the experiences of the century. Turning our glances, then, for the present to the more general topic of the influences brought to bear on religious beliefs, it is almost needless to say, at the outset, that the period on which we look back has been marked by extraordinary intellectual activity in every department of research and enterprise. We seem to be listening to a fairy tale as we read of the extent to which Nature has yielded up her deep secrets to patient investigators, and of the success with which inventive genius has brought the mightiest and most subtle of Nature's forces under easy control. In these respects, the century is without a parallel in history. The record of advance is truly marvellous. Accordingly, men's ideas on many subjects have undergone a complete revolution. We look out on the world with new eyes. Theories and conclusions which science propounded in former days are being swept aside, for the new facts require wider conceptions. In every department of knowledge, there is the throb of eager inquiry; and ever and again the spirit of expectancy is gratified by hearing of fresh scientific triumphs. Accordingly, the conditions of life—economic, social, national—have become greatly changed, and men's mental outlook has been in proportion widened. And this consciousness of progress has been confined to no special class. Through national education and an informing newspaper press, the discoveries of the few become forthwith the possession of all; and everywhere the feeling of advance, of growing insight, of increasing mastery, pervades men's minds. Everywhere there is the impulse, evidencing itself in many ways, to forget the things that are behind, to turn knowledge and progress into power, and still to keep an open mind for new facts and new developments to supersede the old.

Influence on Religious Thought.—And what, then, as to the old faith which was our fathers' life? Has it, too, been

left behind in the forward rush? Must we now content ourselves either with the chill darkness of agnosticism, or with glimmering hopes that a clearer and more fruitful light is about to dawn? There has been no lack of scrutiny. Every question connected with the Faith has been placed under the microscope; everything sacred, whether book or doctrine, has been called on to show its credentials. Science, philosophy, criticism, history, have each been led forward to take part in the testing process. And in no frivolous spirit, not with the contempt which makes a verdict worthless, but in a spirit of seriousness, sometimes even of sadness, as though the far-reaching nature of the interests involved were distinctly realised. How, then, fares it with our religious beliefs at the close of a century in which the strongest searchlight has been steadily brought to bear on each detail? This is no academic question. Every one sensitive to public feeling is aware that this perpetual demand for verification has, among other results, created a widespread uncertainty with reference to beliefs formerly unquestioned. And this feeling of dubiety has been increased by the panic-stricken exaggerations in which good men have often indulged whenever the least modification of existing beliefs has been suggested. Their loud outcries that the foundations are being destroyed largely account for the spread of a suspicion that the foundations are unstable. Especially to this source we may trace much of the cheap, second-hand, but pretentious and blatant scepticism which in many quarters does duty for cleverness. It is no result of real inquiry, but rather the ready inference, willingly drawn, from the excited alarms and sweeping censures which have too often marked religious controversy. But whatever the cause, the fact remains that a restless, uneasy, uncertain feeling in regard to religious truth is abroad, and it seems fitting that some indication be given as to the real bearing of modern progress on our ancient faith.

Theology and Science—Geology.—First let us look at the bearing of modern science upon theology. Older members of the House will remember the fears and misgivings which were aroused during the earlier half of the century, when the researches into the character of the earth's crust, carried on by three famous Scotsmen, Sir Roderick Murchison, Sir Charles Lyell, and Hugh Miller, opened up to men's astonished gaze an endless vista of ages upon ages of creative energy. There, on the one hand, was the clear testimony of the rocks, with their successive strata and their fossil remains; but there, on the other hand, was Ussher's date of creation—4004 B.C.—which had found its way into the Bible, and gained a sort of quasi-canonical authority in men's minds. The mental readjustment required was by no means easy. And a graver difficulty lay behind. Geology seemed to contradict flatly the account of the creation given in Genesis. Anxiety was aroused; and earnest thought and ingenuity were expended in laborious efforts at reconciliation. Unbelief was boastful, as though Holy Scripture were manifestly compromised at its very starting-point. But its jubilations were short-lived, for further reflection brought the discovery that in reality there was no contradiction. The whole trouble had arisen from the mistaken assumption that the opening chapter in Genesis was meant to be an authoritative account of the method and order of the creative work, instead of being, what it is, an inspired and rejoicing recognition of God as the one Creator of all. Its language is not that of the scientist, but of the devout observer and worshipper as he looked abroad on God's works in all places of His dominion, and saw everywhere His power and goodness. Its language, too, is not that of prose, but of poetry, as the structure of the chapter with its parallelisms and refrains sufficiently indicates. It is the great creation hymn. Adopting the simile of a labourer going forth each morning to his work for the day, the poet has a vision of

God as in the first three days preparing three vast untenanted mansions—light, the firmament dividing the waters, and the land. In the second three, he thinks of those mansions as receiving their appropriate occupants. The sphere of light receives on the fourth day the great luminaries of sun and moon; on the fifth, the second mansion, the waters and open firmament, receive fish and fowl; and lastly, on the sixth, came the occupants of the land—living creatures of every kind, and man, their lord, the crown of creative work. Now this plainly is not a lesson in science; it is poetry. But it is more than either science or poetry. It is the voice of God we find in it, making use, it may be, of the primitive cosmogony of that early age, as well as of the dramatic skill of a poetic sage, but using them in order to place in the forefront of His Revelation, in vivid pictures, suited alike for little children and for grown men, for simple tribes and cultured peoples, the primary and everlasting truth that "the worlds were framed by the Word of God."

Geology, accordingly, so far from contradicting Faith, has proved to be its beneficent friend. It has rid our thoughts for ever of the poor, narrow, straitened ideas as to the method and time of God's creative energy, which were formerly counted authoritative. And thus, in common with astronomy—another science for which the century has done much—it has immensely enlarged our ideas of the majesty of God and of His far-reaching purposes and ways. With ever-increasing fulness of adoring wonder, we learn to celebrate His goodness, and with that also the fathomless depths of His condescending grace.

Evolution.—Of more recent years it is from another, although kindred quarter, that apprehensions have arisen. In 1859 Charles Darwin published his epoch-making book, "The Origin of Species;" and since then the fascinating theory that the higher forms of life have been slowly de-

veloped from lower forms in the course of countless ages has been extended to other provinces than Darwin dealt with, and has taken increasing hold of both the scientific and the popular mind, as the true solution of the problem—How things have come to be. Of course, the general idea of evolution is not new: we see it illustrated every day in the growth of living things around us. But what seizes the imagination is the extending of this law of progressive change to account for the endless complexity of forms, features, and faculties which the universe now presents. The theory carries back our thoughts, not over 6000, or 60,000, or 600,000, but over many millions of years, to a time when, we are told, our solar system was no more than a vast whirling cloudland of incandescent gas; and it undertakes to show that all the ordered and varied forms of being now existing have been developed, in the course of an infinitely gradual process, and in obedience to certain forces and laws, from this primal matter. Here, to say the least, we have a magnificent vision. As astronomy has opened up to us an infinite perspective in space, and geology an endless vista in time, so evolution comes forward to present a vast perspective of continuously advancing forms of being. Far as thought may go back, it is still the law of progress that meets the view—organs adjusting themselves to environment in order to greater power, types selecting variations in order to higher rank, and life becoming ceaselessly more complex and rich. Its path may be strewn with dead forms, but ever the law of evolution holds on its way, with upward impulse and beneficent result.

Bearing on the Christian Faith.—Now what bearing has this great nineteenth century theory on the Christian faith? As was to be expected, there are some not slow to assert that, in presence of this all-embracing doctrine, in proof of which an endless array of evidence can be adduced,

Christianity, with its cardinal tenet of Divine interpositions, has become hopelessly discredited, and ought to be numbered forthwith among the superstitions of the past. And some, on the other hand, are as swift to conclude that the theory must be false, because seemingly incompatible with cherished beliefs. In their view it is not possible to harmonise it with the statements of Scripture as to man's creation and fall into sin, or with the reality of the great redemptive work which reached its consummation in the Incarnation and Resurrection of our Lord. So they scout it as a phase of scientific opinion which, like others before it, will sooner or later pass and be forgotten. But if such dogmatism on the one side is rash and unscientific, it is equally on the other side short-sighted and dangerous. There may be danger from attacks, but the danger is greatly increased if defenders blindly adopt a position which may prove untenable. For there can be little doubt that the evolution theory has established a claim to most serious consideration. As time goes on, it is being modified, and no doubt will continue to be modified in respect of details ; but as a great and luminous generalisation from ascertained facts it holds the field. Is it then an enemy or a friend ? Does it meet our faith with a denial, or open up fresh vistas which faith may traverse ?

Here, the point which needs to be made quite distinct is, that evolution in itself simply indicates the method or process by which things have come to be as they are. It tells nothing as to the power which made that method effective, nor as to the intelligence and will which planned and guided it ; it is simply the latest word of science as to the way in which effects have been produced. A theory as to method does not settle the question as to the power employing the method, It is quite as open to faith to think of God as gradually fulfilling His purpose through a patient process extending over myriads of years as it is to think of Him as creating all things as they now are by an abrupt exercise of

power ; and so far as can be gathered from His present way of acting, alike in Nature, in Providence, and in Grace, the verdict of analogy is on the side of the former method.

Evolutionists.—What has brought evolution into suspicion is, that some of its advocates, dazzled by the doctrine, suppose they have found in it the cause as well as the method accounting for the present order. Their minds are so held by the charm and beauty of the physical sequences they are studying that, for the time at least, they are content to look no further, and propose to solve the riddle of existence, both physical and mental, by pointing to an uninterrupted succession of physical changes. The forces resident in Nature, and the laws according to which those forces act, are in their view an all-sufficient agency. They could not, indeed, hide from themselves that to ascribe to force the countless, yet delicately adjusted combinations and correlations which, in every department, tax the intellectual grasp of the ablest observers, was to leave an immense chasm between the cause alleged and the marvellous precision of the results ; accordingly, they set themselves to people the void with subsidiary powers. Hence, such phrases as " the struggle for existence," " the survival of the fittest," " natural selection," " the influence of environment," have become part of our common speech. But does this " machinery of evolution "—to use the happy expression of Professor Iverach, in his recently published trenchant lectures on " Theism in the Light of Present Science and Philosophy "—help their position in the least ? It is as if in answer to Paley's question, " Who made the watch ? " we were pointed to the wheels, mainspring, and hands composing it. Machinery is one thing ; but the power which fashioned each part, and fitted part to part, and made the whole work harmoniously, is something different and higher.

A Groundless Assumption.—Moreover, as time goes on, it is being increasingly recognised that the dogma of an unbroken chain of physical sequences, behind which evolutionists had entrenched themselves, is a groundless assumption. How, it is asked, did life appear on the scene if previously there was only dead matter? Was the new phenomenon, life, a product of physical forces themselves dead? Many of you will remember how keenly this question was discussed some years ago, and the interest felt when in the name of science it was proclaimed that, after a series of exhaustive experiments, spontaneous generation remained unknown. No doubt it was open to men to say, as was said by Le Conte, that "the conditions necessary for so extraordinary a change could hardly be expected to occur but once in the history of the earth, and that, therefore, the impossibility of deriving life from non-life now is no argument against such a derivation once." But clearly science is no longer science if it bases its conclusions, not on facts, but on the most remote possibilities. The latest utterance of biology on the point is this—"The study of the cell has on the whole seemed to widen rather than to narrow the enormous gap that separates even the lowest form of life from the inorganic world." Or, again, it is asked, What as to the origin of mind? Have we here a development from physical causes? The most subtle powers in Nature—heat, light, electricity—are known to be modes of motion, whose mechanical energy has been calculated; but consciousness, reason, memory, imagination, are these things to which weights and measures can be applied, or are they so correlated to physical forces that their mechanical equivalent can be determined? Let me quote the reply given by the distinguished evolutionist, Mr. Fiske, in his work on "Darwinism":—"It is not only inconceivable how mind should have been produced from matter, but it is inconceivable that it should have been produced from matter"—a

statement which the broad sense of mankind at once endorses. In harmony with this statement, Mr. Fiske, in his latest book—a delightful book it is—"Through Nature to God," bears this testimony—"The impetus of modern scientific thought tends with overwhelming force towards the conception of a single First Cause or Prime Mover, perpetually manifested from moment to moment in all the protean changes that make up the universe," and again—"The doctrine of evolution, properly understood, does not leave the scales equally balanced between Materialism and Theism, but irredeemably discredits the former, while it places the latter upon a firmer foundation."

Evolution and Unbelief.—The point, then, to be clearly noted is that evolution ought not to be confounded with the use to which unbelief has sought to put it. It has been seized upon to provide a new dress, and to give fresh plausibility to the old Materialism of the eighteenth century; but evolution is not responsible for that, and already it is repudiating in plainest terms the desired alliance. Nor yet is it in any degree responsible for the kind of Theism with which it is often associated in philosophic quarters. The speculative Theism of the nineteenth century, although different in form from the Deism of the eighteenth, is one with it in spirit. In the earlier century, Deism thought of God as transcendent, dwelling apart from and above the world He had formed. Having with infinite skill constructed the world, and set all its powers agoing, He henceforth held Himself aloof from His workmanship, a mere spectator, unmoved, never interposing. Hence, prayer was folly; belief in revelation, miracle, redemption, was to the men of culture in those days an idle dream. Writing in May, 1736, Bishop Butler gives us this glimpse into the state of things:—"It is come to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but is now at length

discovered to be fictitious. Accordingly, they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment." Time and thought, however, have gone on, and left those "people of discernment" far behind. The new conception science has given us of the world has made their ridicule of Christianity recoil upon themselves. The idea of the world as a machine, wound up like a watch, and then left to itself has been exploded: it is now thought of as an organism, a growing, developing organism; and the energy by which it is sustained and by which it advances is immanent, indwelling, and ceaselessly operating within it. Such, and so far, is the teaching of evolution. But when philosophic Theists go on to affirm that the living, energising power within the universe is necessarily restrained within the course of Nature, and can exercise no activity except along the lines of wonted working, we at once reply that this limiting of a Power which Mr. Herbert Spencer himself defines as "an infinite and eternal energy" is as preposterous as it is presumptuous. We prefer the logic of the centurion, when he argued that if he, although a subordinate, had only to speak the word and those under him would go his errands, much more would a word suffice on the lips of Christ. To point us to an omnipotent and omnipresent Being, who yet has no freedom, self-bound within the limits of His ordinary modes of action; who has given us, His creatures, intelligence and freedom, enabling us to modify the action of natural forces, bending them to our will, and using them for our purposes, yet may not Himself control or modify them; who has given us an ear to hear, a heart to feel, a hand to succour when distress appeals, but may not Himself interpose to rescue or assist—this, by whatever juggling with words it may be supported, is neither science nor philosophy, nor common sense; beneath the philosophic phrases we hear the tones of him who says in his heart, "There is no God."

Evolution and the Supernatural.—Once it is distinctly recognised that evolution, while teaching the immanence of God in His works, does not conflict with the other great side of truth, His transcendence above all that He has made, it becomes obvious that the door for faith in a supernatural revelation is as open as it ever was. And not only so, evolution is an aid to faith. This subject has been dealt with in more or less detail by various writers, and most recently by Mr. Griffith-Jones in his thorough and suggestive volume, "The Ascent Through Christ." A few remarks at present must suffice.

For one thing evolution makes more manifest than ever the unreasonableness of unbelief. It tells us that through the millions of ages past, one purpose has been in view and steadily approached. It also reveals that during those untold ages a ceaseless battle of forces was going forward—forces attracting, repelling, balancing, modifying one the other, now on the most gigantic scale and again on the most minute. It is not the dull, monotonous, elephantine tread of some uniform force we witness, but the perpetual interaction of myriad antagonisms. Yet through this universal conflict, this maelstrom of forces, one unswerving purpose is to be traced, one aim "without variance or shadow of turning"—viz., the making of man, and of this earth to be his home. And here comes in the marvel, or rather the astounding miracle—the end so persistently pursued, and the exact adjustments, the beneficent provisions, the complete harmony, the inspiring beauty which mark its attainment, are in design and execution to be ascribed to force alone—to force, without intelligence or will! Speak of the credulity of Christians! What is it, I pray you, compared with the credulity of unbelief?

The Divine Method.—Then, too, evolution has lessons for us as regards God's present way of working. It shows what

His method was in the past. To our impatience His chariot wheels seem to tarry. We seem to have larger experience of failures and disappointments than of success. It is true that on a broad survey of history we can trace moral and religious progress, the working, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, of a "power making for righteousness;" but how slow and broken the progress is, how often truth and goodness are driven to the wall, how often the toil of weeks and months is undone by an hour of folly! So we are many times depressed, almost despairing, and ready to ask in unbelieving accents—Is the Gospel the power of God unto salvation? At such times the remembrance of God's method in the building up and perfecting of His kingdom in Nature comes and preaches to us both patience and hope. It is not sudden effects we find there, but a far-seeing care working with endless patience, not towards single issues merely, but towards the realisation of a vast and glorious design. And so we hear a voice saying to our fevered spirits—Be still before God; haste is human, not Divine.

> "For we are hasty builders, incomplete;
> Our Master follows after, far more slow
> And far more sure than we, for frost and heat,
> And winds that breathe, and waters in their flow
> Work with Him silently."

The winter snows water the earth, but the fruits are not till autumn. The present is ours; yes, but the future also—"He that believeth shall not make haste."

Divine Nearness.—Evolution, moreover, brings us rich suggestions as to God's relation towards the world and man. It speaks to us of an ineffable nearness, of an all-filling, all-pervading presence, to be daily and devoutly realised. Not that this is a new truth; it is the theme of many an exulting Psalm; it is the lesson our Lord teaches when He speaks of

God clothing the grass of the field and upholding the sparrows in their flight; it is the truth crystallised by St. Paul in the memorable sentence—"In Him we live, and move, and have our being." Still, when Science comes forward to lead us beyond appearances and sequences to the thought of Him who shines in the sunlight and breathes in the air, who "maketh grass to grow on the mountains and covereth the valleys with corn," who keeps each brain working, and each heart beating, and speaks to us in every whisper of conscience, surely we do well to cherish a sense of indebtedness, and to strive after a more devotional feeling in our use of all God's works. You may remember Tennyson's striking lines—

> "Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies,
> I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower; but if I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is."

Yes, He is not far from any one of us; all around is His garment-hem, that we may touch it and find virtue pulsing into us.

Divine Self-Sacrifice.—And does not this nearness, this closeness of relation, assume a new meaning when we lift it up into the light of the crowning truth—God is love? Do not the things of earth proclaim to us in their own tongue the things of heaven? We are familiar with the great fact of the solidarity of the human family—the community of interests which exists, a community of interests wide as the world, reaching through all the centuries, going down to the most minute details. No man lives, or can live, to himself. We are bound by a thousand ties and influences to those around us and to the generations that have gone before, and

we in turn are influencing others. We are no separate units, isolated fragments of humanity, we are members of one living organism, sharers in one common universal life. Similarly, class depends on class, city on city, continent on continent, the links connecting and ramifying further and further, circling the whole globe with countless living ties. Nor is this law of common interests peculiar to earth; through the limitless universe, suns, planets, satellites, moons are all interdependent. We correctly speak of our solar "system," but it again is doubtless part of a still vaster system. Does not all this unity and community of interest shadow and suggest a higher truth—the solidarity betwixt the Creator and His creatures, betwixt the Father of Spirits and the children He has formed? The yawning chasm which Deism opened is, thank God, a nightmare of the past; science and revelation combine in pointing reverent fingers to a God who is, indeed, transcendent, yet who is also, in living contact, ineffably intimate, with the work of His hands; and in the bond of joint and mutual interest which links into one the whole creation, have we not a revelation of the feeling toward our world which fills the heart of Him who formed and animates the whole? From the stamp we learn the character of the seal. He who made all One, thrilling with a common life and common interest, has thereby shown the relation linking Himself to us; and of that everlasting bond we have in the Incarnation the perfect and glorious expression. Fathers and Brethren, we need not be afraid of science. The book of Nature is written by the same hand as the book of Grace; and science by its own dim routes leads us at length to the Manger and the Cross.

Biblical Criticism and Faith.—But when we venture to turn and ask as to the influence which half a century's criticism of the sacred records has had on Faith, do we find ground for maintaining the same fearless attitude? That criticism

has been remorseless, and very often has been far from scientific. For in too many cases the task has not been undertaken in a scientific spirit. When men proceed to question Nature, they do so with open mind. They go to it reverently, even lovingly, docile, and eager to learn its deep secrets from itself. The old deductive method which imposed preconceived theories and conclusions upon Nature has long since been abandoned; our men of science are students sitting at a great teacher's feet, and hence it is they come forth to us with fresh treasures of knowledge. With many critics it has been quite otherwise. They have set themselves to the work under feelings of dislike and antipathy. The claim to supernatural sanction which the Bible carries with it, and the supernatural incidents it narrates, are an offence to them which they are eager to have discredited. Their spirit, accordingly, is the reverse of scientific. They approach the sacred records in the interests of unbelief, with the distinct purpose of undermining, as far as possible, their authority. Obviously, results reached under this influence may be to a large extent discounted.

And on the other side—the side of Faith—there has been a tendency to another extreme. Naturally, we are sensitive, and ought to be sensitive, when rude hands are laid on things most sacred to us, or even when they are laid on opinions or traditions which are associated in our minds with sacred things. But why should the camp resound with shrill cries of alarm as though there were real danger of victory for the foe? Are not our feet upon the Rock of Ages? The man who has found in Jesus Christ the words of eternal life, what has he to fear from the investigations of criticism? It may discover, and have to tell him, that some things he counted ore are dross, and that some things he counted dross are ore; but what then? Does the progress of research into the origin and conditions of life, lead any sane man to question whether he is alive? It may teach him much that

is new and important about the laws of health and the treatment of disease, but it does not touch his consciousness that he is a living man. And as little do the probings of criticism, or the parallels and contrasts of comparative theology, touch the great fact of Christian experience—we know in whom we have believed. In spite of all the strife of tongues and noisy boastings of unbelief, we still hear a voice that says in our heart's depths—"Come unto Me;" and we know His voice and follow Him.

The Church and Hostile Critics.—At the same time, the Church would not be true to its calling if it did not endeavour to meet hostile critics on their own ground. And, indeed, apart from assaults, it is right and fitting that reverent inquiry be made into the methods and agents employed by the Revealer, just as we inquire into the methods and agencies He employed as Creator. And through God's goodness to His Church, and in a special degree to our Free Church, men with a scholarship as ample, an insight as keen, and a critical touch as discriminating as can anywhere be found, have addressed themselves to such inquiries. It would be idle to say they are without bias, for strong evangelical sympathies influence a man unconsciously; but in pursuing inquiry their aim was not, as in the case of unbelief, to find evidence in support of a foregone conclusion, but to find out what the facts regarding each book of Scripture really are, and what conclusions may be justly built upon the facts. Such impartiality may appear to some a fault; but strong men know that truth can never suffer through candour any more than gold when tried by fire.

The Result.—And what, then, has been the result of all the learning, acumen, and fantastic guess work of assailants? —of all the rending and tearing and dislocating and dismembering and piecing and unpiecing of Holy Scripture in

which they have indulged—not to speak of their turning every page into a Joseph's coat of many colours? Why, this, that the grand old words of the Confession—"The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God,"—these grand old words are to-day more widely, and with larger intelligence recognised as true, than when they were penned in the Jerusalem Chamber, 250 years ago. Moreover, through criticism we have learned to recognise and adore the wisdom and grace of the Revealer, in making His discovery of truth progressive, letting out clearer light as men's eyes could receive it. We have learned, too, what the historic occasions were which gave birth to many of the Psalms and many of the prophetic oracles, and in consequence they have become to us more real, more human, more applicable to daily life than when we knew them only as texts. And, more than all else, above the broken wreckage of many a shattered theory, there stands forth in clearer relief than ever, the central Figure of Revelation—the God-man, Christ Jesus—to unbelief, the great enigma of history, the deep riddle it cannot read; to faith, the express image of the Invisible God, the revelation of Divine self-sacrifice, the Destroyer of the works of the devil, the Restorer of our lost inheritance, the Friend and Brother in every need.

The Theological Perspective.—Once more, I may now shortly refer to the change which has taken place during the century in what may be called the Church's theological perspective. Truths which used to be in the forefront in the Church's thought and teaching, are now less prominent,

while others, which were less realised in the past, have now come to the front. This is not a feature to be deprecated. In looking back over Church history, it is interesting to observe how at special periods, special aspects of the truth took possession of men's minds, and for a time dominated their thinking. Just as Paul and Peter, and John and James, while all unfolding the same Divine message, laid emphasis on the side of Truth which chiefly impressed their own minds, so with the generations of the Church since. At successive periods, great truths have in this way entered into the blood and bone of the Church; and thus through the centuries the promise of the Holy Spirit to guide into all truth, is being fulfilled. Sometimes we are reminded of Jeremiah's counsel—"Ask for the old paths;" as though advance were a thing to be frowned upon; but these friends forget that, from the beginning, "the old path" has been the path of progress, and that the advice of the prophet to us, when we have found it, is, not to lie down, but to "walk therein." And those who do so, make this discovery that, the more simply, earnestly, fearlessly, they surrender their minds to the guidance of the Spirit of all Truth, speaking to them through the manifold channels through which He speaks, the more they find that there are depths of wisdom and knowledge in God's Word beyond what they had before seen, that their best and highest thoughts have been there anticipated, that truths which came upon them like intuitions or inspirations, had ages before been expressed by holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Archdeacon Hare has forcibly said—"The moral truths after which the wise of this world strive and pant, and of which, if they catch a glimpse, they cry Eureka, bless their genius, and spread their peacock's tail to the sun, are common household words in the New Testament." The same is the case with religious truths. The treasure is there; yes, but it is "hid treasure" till we have the eyes to

see it. It is not ours till we have found it for ourselves, through the leading of the Spirit of Truth.

Sovereignty and Fatherhood.—When our Confession was compiled, the dominant thought was the Sovereignty of God; the dominant thought at present is the Fatherhood of God. The change has been brought about by various influences, but is chiefly due to the degree in which religious thought, during the latter part of the century, has concentrated attention on our Lord's personal teaching. And it is not very long since the idea was current that these two great aspects of Truth were incompatible; and the prominence given to God's Fatherly character was regarded with jealous anxiety. But these days are passing; men now see that the one truth is the complement of the other; that the two are different sides of one and the same relation. For we now draw our ideas of Divine Sovereignty not from the stern rule of autocrats, but from an earlier and truer type of rightful authority. Where did Sovereignty begin? What is its natural source? It began in the family. The first Father was the first sovereign or head, clothed with authority and rule; and his kingdom was his family. Or, in the words of Principal Fairbairn—"The only absolute natural kingship, is neither a creation of law, as in constitutional monarchies, nor a creation of power, as in imperial despotisms, but a creation of Nature—paternal. In the father we find the ideal of the king—absolute by natural right." So far then from setting aside, or even obscuring, the truth of God's Sovereignty, the recognition of His Fatherhood serves to dismiss for ever those cold, hard, fatalistic notions, which, during the reign of a dead, Deistic Moderatism, when the doctrines of grace were in abeyance, had come to be associated with it. If in the Divine reality, as in the human type, sovereignty has its source in the family relationship, and draws its inspiration and its strength from love, it

is with no dull acquiescence we have to think of it, but with joyful confidence and gratitude. With good reason may we bind the yoke of this sovereignty upon our necks! For it is a sovereignty that has spared no sacrifice that the lost might be found; a sovereignty that aims at advancing us in knowledge and usefulness and power; a sovereignty whose high purpose will be realised only when those whom His love has redeemed are brought to reign with Him for ever.

Attitude to Matters of Faith.—From this glance over the century we may, I think, draw two lessons as to our attitude in reference to matters of faith. It teaches us to cherish believing confidence, and also to exercise patient discrimination. The Apostolic counsel—"Prove all things, hold fast that which is good," suggests that things with a doubtful look ought not to be dismissed without proof, and that on being proved, elements of "good" may be found which should be held fast.

Owing to our Scottish fervour, we are in danger of confounding the letter with the spirit, the form with the substance, man's traditions with God's truth, the circumstantial with the essential. So we have sometimes mistaken friends for foes, and fought needless battles with needless heat. Would that we concentrated energy in the one supreme struggle! I often think of these two sayings of Christ—"He that is not with Me is against Me," and "He that is not against us is on our part." They seem inconsistent, but in reality express the same feeling. The former, "He that is not with Me is against Me," refers to His mission as the destroyer of the works of the devil, and reveals His intensity of purpose. We hear the tones of one who has applied Himself, heart and hand, with might and main, to the work of saving. It is the language of one who has enlisted His every energy in the cause, and recks not of toil or fatigue, or suffering, or even death, in His desire to set

sin's bondslaves free. Hence there is the intolerance of intensity—"He that is not with Me is against Me." He has no recognition for the dreamer, the idle onlooker, the passive well-wisher; if men are not "for Him," ready to stand at His side, and take their part in the strain of the conflict, He owns them not. But what then as to the second saying, breathing such wide tolerance—"He that is not against us is for us"? The context explains. John had come with a complaint against some one who had been casting out devils, and added, "We forbade him because he followeth not with us." The sectarian spirit is not new! The man was doing a good work, he was doing it in Christ's name, yet John would stop him because "he followeth not with us." With such a feeling Jesus had no sympathy. His one care was that the good work should be done—the devil cast out—and hence the peremptory reply: "Forbid him not; he that is not against us is on our part." The catholicity of this text, accordingly, adds striking emphasis to the intensity of the other. To the great seeking heart of Christ it is of very secondary moment how men help forward healing and saving work, if so be the work is done. What He has no patience for is the crying of "Lord, Lord," instead of the doing of His will—the wasting of energy in strifes and divisions betwixt brethren, instead of dedicating it wholly to the work for which He gave His life on the tree of shame. With Him the engrossing concern is the struggle with evil—the breaking in upon and breaking down of the tyranny of sin and misery. Hence, whatever may be the distinctions which otherwise separate men, the main consideration with Him is each man's relation towards the strife with evil. Their places in the battlefield may be very various—some prominent, others obscure; some trained and veteran, others young and unskilled; some wielding the two-edged sword, others carrying cups of living water to the wounded, some in the death grapple with a giant evil, others

on their knees apart in prayer; but whatever their strength, or skill, or manner of service, if they are on His side, He owns them with gratitude; and we can hear His voice saying as of old—"Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint unto you a Kingdom as My Father hath appointed unto Me."

LEARNING LIBERALITY

LEARNING LIBERALITY

OR THE

STORY OF THE SUSTENTATION FUND*

WHEN Dr. CHALMERS, at the Convocation of Ministers and Elders in November, 1842, expounded his proposals regarding a Sustentation Fund, which should take the place of the endowments to be surrendered, the proposals, he tells us, were received with the "listlessness, not of indifference alone, but of real and positive unbelief." Many of his hearers, probably, still cherished the hope that, in spite of all that had come and gone, the State would in the end yield to the Church's claim and make separation unnecessary; and this to some extent may have accounted for their attitude. But there was more. The practised eye of the speaker saw incredulity written on the faces of his audience. Their unbelief was too real to be concealed; and had he been other than the strong man he was, such a response to his glowing words would have dismayed him. And we can scarcely wonder at the manifest scepticism. For what had been the previous experience of his listeners as regards the liberality of their people? Had not the Church collections, Sabbath by Sabbath, consisted of a pitiful driblet of coppers, and were not special appeals met with criticisms rather than coins? Hence, as they heard of methods by which thousands and tens of thousands of pounds were to be

* This speech is published along with the Opening and Closing Addresses, as it illustrates a feature of Scottish Church Life which is simply named in the Closing Address.

annually raised, it is not surprising that their looks betrayed the feeling that enthusiasm had carried their great leader into Sir Thomas More's Utopia. They were disposed to say, like him of old, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" They could not forget that all the inspiring eloquence of Chalmers himself had been required a few years before to raise the single sum of £100,000 for Church Extension; and how was such a sum, in addition to other enormous outlays, to be looked for as a stated income?

Doubts such as these were natural enough, but Chalmers and the splendid band of leaders around him had more truly estimated the strength of the forces at work, and knew that if the ministers stood true to their professed convictions the people would not fail them. Accordingly, as the weeks passed, and the crisis grew more acute, they proceeded to put their plans into operation; and before the memorable day—18th May, 1843—had come round, a large number of associations for the collecting of weekly or monthly contributions had been formed, and were ready to begin work. So vigorously and speedily did they address themselves thereafter to their duties, and so generous was the response of the people—rich and poor alike—that Dr. Chalmers in 1844 could announce a Sustentation Fund revenue of £68,704, 14s. 8d., and a dividend of £105 to each ordained minister of the Church. In those days that sum was relatively larger than it is now; and the first year's effort surprised not a little both friends and foes. And hostile onlookers were not backward with their predictions. A spasmodic effort this, they said, the fruit of excited feeling and of special pressure, a year or two will suffice to bring the inflated balloon to earth again in collapse and wreck. If they had personally known the power of religious conviction—the power which had made their Scottish forefathers brave persecution, imprisonment, and death for the truth's sake—

they would have been more chary of their prophecies ; but in the absence of that knowledge, and judging others by themselves, they had no doubt that the pleasure of making sacrifices would soon pall. The wave of enthusiasm would soon roll past.

But how stands the case to-day ? Other fifty-six years have fled, and the charge at present against us is not excess, but lack of enthusiasm—a temperature distinctly sub-normal, say the good friends who attend so anxiously to our health ; but if the state of our chief Fund supplies an index to the condition of the Church's heart, how fares it with us ? As you will observe, it is my privilege and honour to report this year a total sum of £188,146,10s. 5d., an increase over last year of £4118, 4s. 5d.; an increase over 1898 of £14,619, 19s. 4d.; and over 1897 of £15,705, 8s. 9d. Comparing the figures with those of 1844, it is seen that while the number of participating ministers has about doubled, the amount divisible has been nearly trebled.

The period covered by the history of our fund, remarkable in many respects, has been not less remarkable for the development of liberality. Such proposals as Chalmers made in 1842 would, in like circumstances, excite no incredulity to-day. Nor can the Free Church claim any monopoly in respect of this progress ; it is common in greater or less degree to all the Churches. It is with satisfaction we note that the revenues of the Established Church are annually rising, and we trust the leaders of that Church may soon begin to look towards the position of financial independence to which their people are pointing them. And outside the circle of church-effort, the same generous sympathies and impulses are being shown. Who of us could fail to note with gratitude the splendid manner in which the country rose to the successive appeals which, one after another, crowded in upon us during recent months ? From whatever quarter the cry of need came—

whether from the refugees in South Africa, or from the families of the brave men fighting our country's battles; whether from the famine-stricken millions in India, or from the thousands rendered homeless by the awful fire in Ottawa —the great British heart tingled with sympathy, and out flowed streams of help for the distressed. Let pessimists croak as they may, the country animated by so generous a spirit, and so ready with a helping-hand, is sound at the core, and worthy to hold its foremost place among the nations.

But how has it come about that the last half-century in Scotland presents so striking a contrast in this respect to previous years? Two causes have been at work—the prevalence of evangelical teaching, and the habit of contributing free-will offerings to the cause of Christ. I am not now referring to England, where the same causes have been at work during a much longer period; nor am I forgetting that they were also at work in Scotland for a century before 1843; at the same time, the fact remains that a signal start in the development of liberality dates from the year of the Disruption. Some may call this a coincidence; I believe the House will agree with me that there is a vital relation between the two. And if any one fund has been specially instrumental in fostering this advance, it has been the Sustentation Fund. The loyal services of our collectors, as month by month they go their rounds, yield far richer results than merely contributions. They have been the chief means, in God's hand, of educating every district in the land in the highest of the Christian graces. Under their influence generous impulse has passed into generous habit, and generous habit into generous nature. The givings of our people have thus come back into their own bosoms—returned to them in the priceless gifts of enlarged sympathies and more spontaneous self-denial—the priceless blessing of having "the same mind in us which was in Christ Jesus."

From this year's Report on Persons and Agencies, it appears that out of 10,146 deacons 3744 act as collectors, and that besides these we have other collectors for the Fund, chiefly lady collectors, to the number of 9102. To these willing and self-denying helpers, numbering together 12,846, we tender our warmest thanks. And I should like also to say to the 6402 brethren who do not collect—although ordained to an office which was expressly revived in the interests of the Sustentation Fund—that if they realised the spiritual results arising from what looks like the secular work of collecting, I am sure they would desire to have some share in the privilege of effecting them. Especially, I would entreat them to use their wise and kindly influence with the young in their districts; that as soon as young men or women begin to handle money of their own, they may begin also to reap the benefit of consecrating a portion of it to other than merely selfish ends.

In glancing back over the history of the Fund, we have to think of it in the twofold light of what has been called its "dynamics" and its "mechanics"—the motive-powers behind it, and the methods which give effect to that power.

As to the former, let us not fail to own, with gratitude and humility, the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. Many as have been our shortcomings, He has graciously continued to make His power felt alike in our work as a Church, and in our several congregations. To this we ascribe the warm love and loyalty towards the Church—even to its very name—which we meet with in both Highlands and Lowlands. Our people feel that as it has been a Christ-honouring, so it has been also a Christ-honoured Church; and they count it a privilege as well as a duty to support it. Then, too, our people's appreciation of the noble and generous plan on which the Fund is administered has had much to do with its prosperity. From the first, Dr. Chalmers' conception

of a common Fund, into which every congregation, whether rich or poor, should give according to its ability, and out of which every minister should receive an equal dividend, took hold of the popular imagination and heart, as stamped with the impress of Christian Brotherhood. They saw in it a new and striking manifestation of the spirit which, in the first love of the primitive Church, had suggested the idea of having all things in common. And the manner in which the plan was taken up by the richer congregations deepened this impression. For everything depended on their attitude. Would they be prepared to place the interests of the Church above those of the Congregation, the interests of the ministry before those of their own minister, the interests of the whole above those of each individual part? The answer was given by Dr. Candlish of St. George's, and it was unequivocal. Let his congregation pour their thousands into the common treasury: he was content to receive the same dividend as went to the most obscure of his brethren in the remotest corner of Scotland. Enough—the inspiring example sufficed, the plan was adopted; and ever since, the people of the Free Church, and many beyond its borders, have seen in this Fund the finest modern example of "bearing one another's burdens," and thereby "fulfilling the law of Christ." Hence our regard for this Fund is such that it almost stands on the level of an Article of Faith with us; and, in view of the proposed happy Union, we have every confidence that when our United Presbyterian brethren and sisters come to consider it more closely, they will find in it the same beauty and attractiveness which have so long endeared it to us. Indeed, I can conceive of no outward arrangement better fitted to foster and confirm the feeling of unity in the United Church than that all, like a united household, should receive their Sustentation from a common family "Board." And all the more so, if the United Church should realise Milton's lines:—

"Fruit of all kinds . . .
She gathers, tribute large, and on the board
Heaps with unsparing hand."

But while a well-laid plan is more than half the battle, many details have to be attended to if success is to be won; and this leads me to the "mechanics" of the Fund. Our main dependence is upon our "Associations." That name puzzles strangers as though it pointed to some agency different from the congregations interested. In point of fact it is a survival. It is the name which was given to the bands of collectors formed during the months prior to the Disruption, when as yet Free Church Congregations did not exist, and somehow it has been retained, although the congregation, under the direction of the Deacons' Court, is now the Association. And here, let me confess that the wish has at times crossed my mind that the name did stand for a distinct organisation with office-bearers of its own. For, owing to the weakness of human nature, especially when that weakness attains cumulative effect in a Deacons' Court, there have been times when a closed eye was turned on the interests of the General Fund, and a single eye given to the convenience of the congregation, or the increased comfort of the minister. Hence, all along the history of the Fund, there have been instances where it was allowed to languish and go down, because some local building was required, or some debt had to be cancelled, or some increase of supplement was desirable, and, more recently, because an organ was being procured, and the Church cleaned and painted. Now, all these are good and worthy objects, but every impartial person sees that the expense ought not in any degree to be borne by the Church's Fund for the support of the ministry. Most probably these things ought to be done, but not through the other being left undone. And those courts and congregations should be specially scrupulous which are aid-receiving, otherwise they are taking non-

voluntary contributions from the ministers of the Church for their local objects.

Because of this local conflicting of interests, the Church found it desirable to introduce from time to time various checks and stimuli, and regulations, to prevent as far as possible any abuse of its generosity. The earliest of these was known as the One-and-a-Half Scheme, according to which new charges contributing only £100 a-year or under were to receive back what they gave and one-half more. This plan, however, soon broke down, and a return was made to an equal dividend pure and simple for all congregations. In 1855 the subject of new charges was again brought up and remitted to a Special Committee, and on its report, three years afterwards, certain proposals were sent to Presbyteries for their consideration. Other three years elapsed before the Church took definite action, but at length, in 1861, it established what is known as the Platform of the Equal Dividend, and drew a distinction between Platform Charges and what were called, "Mission or Experimental Charges." It also appointed a Committee to regulate the admission of charges to the Platform, or their removal from it, an arrangement which holds till now. But as to the distinction of congregations into two classes, it gradually became apparent that this did not adequately meet the necessities of the case; and so a third class of congregations was formed, intermediate between the other two. Whereas Mission Charges got back only what they contributed up to the amount of the equal dividend, it was arranged that this class, under the same limit as to amount, should receive a sum not exceeding £100 in addition to their contributions; and the Platform Committee was authorised to place congregations under this arrangement whenever, on the occasion of a vacancy, it appeared to be desirable to do so. The congregations so arranged with are known as "Congregations under the Acts 1875 and 1877."

In looking back on this legislation, it must be borne in mind that the Church was then only in process of being educated in liberality, and that the desire to meet the wants and wishes of even the poorest districts made Church Extension outstrip the growth of necessary income. These class distinctions, which, on the first glance, may appear to have a niggard look, were thus forced upon the Church, if it was to continue the work of Extension without seriously endangering the Central Fund. The notable feature really is the self-sacrificing way in which Assembly after Assembly went on erecting new charges, although the ministerial members were perfectly aware that this meant the continued keeping-down, if not the decrease, of their own income. They did so with their eyes open, for the powerful voice of Dr. Begg was often heard inveighing against so rapid a multiplication of charges, yet the Church went forward notwithstanding — ministers being more concerned about supplying the wants of the people than about being themselves supplied.

But though these distinctions were necessary at the time, and served a valuable purpose, the question may fairly be raised before long whether they are still required. For my part, I dislike class distinctions betwixt congregations; and I believe that in the past they have proved a snare to the Church. They have led to the sanctioning of charges that ought not to have been sanctioned, and that would not have been sanctioned but for the feeling that they were not to be placed upon the dividend platform. Yet, so soon as a few years had passed, up came these charges claiming to be placed on the platform, and although they might be practically unchanged, either in numbers or resources from what they were at first, yet, if they had not gone back, their claim was allowed. Last Assembly modified this: still, the better course seems to be to create no new life interest in connection with doubtful cases, until first they have been put to the

test of time, either under an Ordained Preacher, or in some other way.

Another matter which has considerably exercised the mind of the Church is the disposition, which has too widely prevailed, to pay supplements out of proportion to the contributions to the Sustentation Fund. Many will remember how the burden of Dr. Wilson's addresses, when giving in his Reports, was a complaint over the growing tendency to congregationalism in finance; and he urged, as a pre-Disruption veteran was well entitled to do, a revival of the nobler spirit which gave the primary place to the interests of the Church as a whole. Accordingly, from time to time, the Assembly dealt with the subject; and at length, in 1893, a series of explicit regulations were adopted, setting forth what the Church requires and expects in all ordinary circumstances. These regulations the Committee are doing their best to make prominent, and possibly they may have to ask for larger powers, in order sometimes to enforce them; but they would infinitely prefer to see effect given to them under a fine sense of congregational honour rather than under the constraint of authority.

It is not necessary, in this brief review, to go into detail regarding the various methods by which the Church, in connection with this Fund, carried on its great work of educating in liberality. I shall refer to one only, the most notable, the Surplus Fund Scheme adopted by the Assembly of 1867. Up to that date the equal dividend had never got beyond £144; and Dr. Buchanan's proposal in substance was that, after a dividend of £150 had been reached, the surplus should be divided among those whose congregations contributed at the rates of 10s. and 7s. 6d. per member; the higher rate entitling to a two-thirds share of the surplus, and the lower to a one-third share. Partly through the stimulus this plan gave, and partly because of the thorough visitation of congregations which followed upon its adoption, the Fund

rose £10,000 in the course of the year, and after paying the dividend of £150, a surplus of about £4000 remained for distribution. Eleven years afterwards, in 1879, the dividend was raised to £160; but the surplus, which had reached its highest point at the Glasgow Assembly in the previous year, now began to droop, owing to the rapid increase of the congregations drawing an equal dividend. In 1878, the number of full dividends paid was 766; next year there were 10 more; in the following year other 15 were due; and in the course of the twenty years to 1898, the number had risen from 766 to 875, an increase of 109. Meantime, the Fund remained fairly stationary about £171,000, making it obvious that from one cause or another all spring had gone out of the Surplus Scheme, and that if the Church was to make a forward movement some new motive must be brought to bear on conscience and heart. Accordingly, five years ago, I had the honour of submitting to the Assembly the plan which is at present followed in the distribution of surplus—viz., that after payment in every case of the Widows' Fund premium of £7, and of a real, not nominal, dividend of £160, the surplus shall be distributed among those only whose ministerial income is less than £200, and in so far only as may be necessary to bring them up to that amount. It was further agreed that so far as regards this surplus, all distinctions between classes of congregations should be disregarded, and that all under £200 should share and share alike.

The impressions to be gathered from a review of the history of the Fund are chiefly these two—first, that what stirs the imagination and heart of Free Church people is the idea of a common fund for the whole country, administered on the plan of an equal dividend; and second, that while self-acting checks and official circulars are both necessary and useful, the chief protection against either indifference or abuse is to be found in the living, personal influence of an

earnest and experienced visitor. Within the last few years we have seen what can be accomplished by men of the ability, energy, tact, and persuasiveness of Mr. Lee, and of those who have assisted him as deputies, when they come into direct contact with Deacons' Courts and Congregations, and impart to them some of their own enthusiasm. The interest is already in the people's hearts—the liberal impulse is already there—but needing to be quickened from time to time by a stimulating and guiding word. Accordingly, the Organisation Sub-Committee, which happily enjoys the wise and vigorous guidance of our experienced friend, Mr. J. M. M'Candlish have suggested that the Assembly renew instructions that, apart from exceptional cases, which may require special visitation, every congregation should receive a visit in the interest of the Fund once in five years. How fruitful the work of visitation may be when conducted in a genial spirit and with definite aims, is seen from the increase in the amount from Associations during the last three years. In May, 1898, after the movement had been so nobly initiated in Aberdeen, the increase was £1795, 6s. 1d.; the further increase at May, 1899, was £5967, 9s. 4d.; and this year again £4100, 19s. 5d.; making the total increase for the three years £11,863,14s.10d. A month ago the increase from this, our chief source of revenue, was sadly pulled down by a heavy decrease in the amount from donations and legacies, the decrease amounting to £3756, 18s. 1d.; and there were grave fears lest the upward efforts of our congregations would be completely neutralised by this great shortcoming. However, after the merry month of May had arrived, a number of large-hearted friends, having regard to the special circumstances of this year, began pouring in special donations, some of them of very large amounts. Lord Overtoun, in place of his usual donation of £1000, sent me a cheque for £2000; while other friends showed their interest by cheques of £500, £250,

£200, £100, £50, and lesser amounts. Certainly, the Church is to be congratulated that has such enthusiasm and noble generosity to draw upon. The surplus remaining after the ordinary payments are made is £15,862, 1s. 7d. ; and this admits not only of the payment of the Widows' Fund premium to each minister, but also of £16, 10s., or a total surplus of £23, 10s., to all those whose income is under £200. This result, I know, will awaken sincere thanksgivings in many a manse, but I also believe that it will cause as genuine a satisfaction to those who have given, as to those who will receive. If it is not altogether what we aimed at, it is yet remarkably near it. And perhaps it is better that success should not be absolutely complete, for it is not good for a Church, any more than for an individual, to suppose that it has already attained, either is already perfect. If we are not to go back, our motto must still be—"Forward"; and if I do not greatly mistake the temper of the Church, we shall continue to go forward.

By another year, it is true, the situation will be in all likelihood different from what it is at present. But as regards our great scheme, as in other respects, I look to the future not with fear but with expectation. Our United Presbyterian friends are as anxious as we are to realise a minimum of £200 for every minister, and in the arrangements proposed with a view to Union, that aim is made prominent. In the effort to reach that aim, it is further proposed, that action shall proceed upon the lines of our Sustentation Fund, and it cannot be doubted that, when our friends exchange the idea of augmenting poorer congregations for the more catholic and inspiring idea of sustaining over the length and breadth of Scotland a great national Church, there will be a corresponding enlarging of their liberality. Leading members of the United Presbyterian Church have often said in private—what was publicly expressed in this House yesterday—that they have long

coveted some share in the privilege the Free Church enjoys of maintaining Gospel ordinances in our wide but sparsely-populated Highlands ; and I cannot doubt that this large-hearted and patriotic feeling will be cordially and generously endorsed by their congregations, as soon as they get the opportunity. It may be, therefore, that we have been denied the gratification of fully realising this year our cherished aim, in order that the first ordinary Assembly of a United Free Church may, among other evidences of Christian advance, be signalised by the announcement of a *minimum* stipend of £200 for every minister of the United Church. Meantime, while we thank all those to whose diligent and watchful care the gratifying result already reached is largely due, let us gratefully acknowledge the splendid loyalty of our people to this Fund during all the stress and changes of fifty-seven years ; and let us, who are ministers, evince our appreciation not merely by words, however sincere, on the floor of this House, but by addressing ourselves with renewed consecration to the service of Him who, in His great goodness, has called us to minister to a people so true and considerate, and so worthy of our very best.

SCOTTISH CHURCH LIFE

SCOTTISH CHURCH LIFE

CLOSING ADDRESS

FATHERS AND BRETHREN,—Let me, first of all, offer you again my warmest thanks for the privilege you have conferred on me of occupying the chair on this historic occasion, and thank you also for the marked kindness and consideration with which you have received my imperfect endeavours to fulfil the duties of so responsible a position. And I know I express your feelings when I say that we have signal cause to render thanks to our Divine Head and King for His gracious presence among us, and for the spirit of unanimity and brotherliness which has characterised all the proceedings of the Assembly. We have had honest differences of opinion expressed in connection with the momentous subject which chiefly engaged our thoughts; but those who differed from the line of action taken by the majority of the House expressed their views with such a total absence of bitterness, or of any suggestion of separating from their brethren, that we have every reason to expect that, as the weeks go on, their difficulties will increasingly disappear. This may the more confidently be looked for because of the reception the Assembly willingly extended to the "Declaration" presented by a number of honoured brethren who were previously opposed to the Union. Moreover, the scruple mainly influencing the majority appeared

to arise from a fear lest the Church's attitude towards the great principle of Christ's Headship over the nations should be changed if the Church entered into this union. But I am free to say from this chair that such a fear is groundless. Our testimony as a Church to that principle, and to the correlative duty of nations and their rulers to serve Christ, and to further the interest of His Kingdom in every way consistent with the Church's spirituality and freedom, will be in no degree abated. It is the more necessary to emphasise this, because of the statement made last night from the chair of the Established Assembly, that this "vital principle," heretofore enshrined in the name—the Church of Scotland Free—"will have disappeared." The remark is as unfounded as it was uncalled for; and it would not have been made unless the mist on this subject which has been shrouding our Highland hills had befogged the vision of the able minister of Inverness. Alike for his Church and for this Church, the only authoritative statement of this principle is contained in the Confession of Faith; and in the entire course of the Union Committee's discussions, not a single suggestion was made to alter a syllable of the Confession's statement on the subject. We shall enter the united Church, carrying that principle with us, and free to give it practical effect according as our Divine Head may require. And that being so, may we not hope that, when we do pass into the union which has now been irrevocably sanctioned, we shall do so with unbroken ranks, standing shoulder to shoulder as in years gone by, with the common resolve to dedicate our reinforced energies and resources to the more adequate overtaking of our true mission as a power for Christ in the land—alike in Lowland parishes and in Highland glens.

In my address at the opening of the Assembly, I was bold enough to indicate that, on the present occasion, I would review the life and work of our Scottish Churches as

developed throughout the century. The mass of material lying to one's hand for such a sketch is so great that I must at the outset ask your indulgence for the very slight manner in which so interesting and instructive a theme can be treated in the course of a single address. Only some of the more salient features can be touched upon.

The Background.—The key-note of an address on this subject ought to be that of thanksgiving. Many and great as are the evils we have at present to deplore and fight with, a glance over the past reveals a century of progress. Yet we may not forget that the brightness of the picture is to a large extent due to the darkness of the background. The condition of things at the beginning of the century was truly lamentable. During the greater part of the previous century Moderatism had reigned triumphant within the national Church, and religion had almost perished under its blighting influence. Dr. Chalmers referred to the period as "an age of cold and feeble rationality, when evangelism was derided as fanatical, and its very phraseology was deemed an ignoble and vulgar thing in the upper classes of society." For a specimen of the prevailing state of mind and feeling, take the reception given by the General Assembly of 1796 to two overtures suggesting action on behalf of foreign missions. Dr. Hill, then the recognised leader of the Assembly, denounced the missionary societies then being started as "highly dangerous in their tendency to the good order of society at large." Mr. Boyle, afterwards Lord Justice-General, improved on this by asserting that the funds of such societies "may in time, nay, certainly will be, turned against the Constitution; so it is the bounden duty of the House to give the overtures our immediate, most decisive opposition"! Such words strike us of to-day as amazing; yet if for the word "Constitution" we substitute the word

"Moderatism" the sentence is not so wide of the mark. The stirring of life which these overtures revealed would certainly be "turned against" the prevailing death. This was the time also when the right of congregations to choose their ministers was so entirely ignored that the will of the patron was carried out, wherever necessary, with the help of bayonets. John Galt, in his delightful "Annals of the Parish," describes a typical case, in the settlement of the Rev. Micah Balwhidder in the parish of Dalmailing. The parishioners were so opposed that the Presbytery, when proceeding to the church, required a guard of soldiers: but even that did not protect them from the mud-throwing of the indignant people. On arriving at the church, behold, the door had been securely nailed up. A suggestion was made to break it open, but the presentee objected under a wholesome fear of landing the heritors in expense. On this, the whole party, followed by the people, clambered in by a window. Calm was maintained during sermon, but when the time for ordination came, a venerable elder rose, protesting, "Verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not in by the door, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." The only thoroughly satisfactory element in the day's proceedings was the excellent dinner which followed upon the solemn farce. Now, it goes without saying, that under such a regimé as this, continued over the greater part of a century, multitudes sank into total religious indifference. And on disregard for religion there quickly followed disregard for moral and social authority. Free-thinking and loose living ran riot together throughout the land; and these, in turn, arousing unrestrained passions, threatened the foundations of social order and stability. Not only were the pious in the land filled with dismay, but politicians and statesmen became alarmed; and in their alarm they became conscious how utterly the interests of Christ's cause had been betrayed by the time-serving,

pleasure-seeking party which had so long domineered over the Church.

Secession.—But God had not cast off our nation, nor left Himself without witnesses. Just as in England He had drawn forth from Oxford a band of young men filled with heavenly fire—the Wesleys, Whitfield, James Hervey, William Law—to save the country from spiritual death and corruption, so in Scotland He had men like Ebenezer Erskine and Thomas Gillespie, who preferred to suffer deposition and social ostracism rather than silently acquiesce in the travesty of sacred things which the Church not merely tolerated but required. In his celebrated Synod sermon at Perth in 1732, Ebenezer Erskine sent ringing sentences like these over Scotland: "How are the rights of the Lord's people invaded and trod upon by violent settlements up and down the land! What a miserable bondage would it be reckoned for any family to have stewards or servants imposed on them by strangers, who might give the children a stone for bread or a scorpion instead of a fish—poison instead of medicine! And shall we suppose that ever God granted a power to any set of men, patrons, or heritors, or whatever they be, to impose servants on His family without their consent, they being the freest society in the world?" As we think of the man who sounded those trumpet-blasts in that dark and servile age, we feel that he is a man to be claimed and reverenced, not by the Secession Church alone, or the United Presbyterian Church alone, but equally by the Free Church, and, indeed, as things now are, by all our Scottish Churches; and that Moderatism, in ejecting him and his brethren, while it wrote its own condemnation, rendered also its best service to Scotland. For let none forget what we of to-day owe to the brave stand then made, and to the fidelity with which the ejected men and the ever-growing body of their successors held aloft the torch of

Gospel truth through the long, dreary night that followed. Indeed, the debt of reverent gratitude which Scotland owes to them and to the sons of the Covenanters is greater far than has ever yet been realised.

The Evangelical Party.—Moreover, within the national Church, although the process of secession went on continuously, there never ceased to be an evangelical section—weak, sorely tried, and, as regards the general policy of the Church, helpless, yet faithfully ministering in their parishes, and looking and praying for better days. And at length there came the dawning of a better time. When the century was still young a change of feeling began to steal over the country, through the reviving power of the Divine Spirit; and here and there, and very specially in the quiet Manse of Kilmany, He who has world-wide purposes of grace to advance through Scotland was fitting and furnishing those who should arouse the country to sacrifices and services for Christ and His Evangel, on a scale unknown before. Nor have we to think merely of the resistless eloquence and force of an Andrew Thomson and a Thomas Chalmers; but also of that consecrated band of which Murray M'Cheyne and William Burns may be named as representative, whose apostolic fervour, with its apostolic results, sent a thrill of wonder and expectancy through the awakened land. The long-stifled religious feeling of an earnest nation was no longer to be suppressed. Old things had passed away. Eternal realities assumed new proportions. All things became new. Speak to the people now of forcing hirelings upon them to instruct them and their children in the things of God! Nay, verily. The Church felt it must expressly guard against such a thing being attempted; and, accordingly, not doubting that, both of inherent right and by solemn statute, it was warranted in doing so, the Assembly of 1834, by a considerable majority, passed the famous

"Veto Act," giving Presbyteries power to reject a presentee when the majority of the congregation disapproved of his being called. It was a wise and righteous Act, imperatively demanded also; but soon it appeared that the Civil Courts had something to say of a drastic and far-reaching character to the Church's effort at legislation, and thus the struggle for freedom was renewed, which we may call the primary feature in our Scottish Church life.

The Freedom of the Church.—The prominence given in Scotland to the question of the right relation between Church and State is a matter of astonishment to Churches beyond our borders. They look upon it as a curious Scottish characteristic, which they scarcely attempt to understand. On the one hand, there are those who view the matter from the calm levels of Erastian contentment, and wonder why we should fight against the Royal supremacy, which, to them, seems so fitting. On the other hand, there are the Churches throughout America and our Colonies who never dream now about a State connection, and to whom our keen contendings are just an interesting example of the survival of old-world-ism in "dear old Scotland." Yet, possibly because of our Scottish pride, we listen to these criticisms unmoved, and with Scottish logic we find in their contradictory character our justification. We are conscious that, as far back as the Reformation, God in His Providence gave this question in a distinctive way to Scotland, and until the true and wise settlement of it has been reached we have humbly to recognise our responsibility and to look to our Divine Head for guidance. At the time of the Reformation, the recoil in Germany from the Papal claim to control Church and State alike was so great that feeling swung blindly to the opposite extreme. The right of the Church to self-government was not thought of; the direction of its affairs was placed without question in the hands

of the civil power. To some extent this can be accounted for. Luther and his associates were conscious how much they owed under God to the Elector of Saxony and the other princes who had espoused their cause; and they naturally considered that the interests of the Church were safe in the hands of rulers who had so powerfully protected and aided them during the fierce stress of the struggle with Rome. Whether it was right to surrender in this way their allegiance to the Church's Divine Head, or whether it was wise to rely on finding the same sympathetic temper always, were questions which did not present themselves; enough that those then in power had taken the right side and might be trusted. It was a short-sighted policy; and independence surrendered became independence lost. Similarly in England, though in different circumstances and under different feelings, the rights of the Church were allowed to pass into abeyance. Bowing before the will of a despot, the Reformed Church offered no remonstrance when Henry VIII. clothed himself with the spiritual as well as temporal authority of which the Roman Pontiff had been stripped. The Royal assumption of spiritual control was not even discussed; it was simply accepted as final; and final it has remained till this day. In the case of the Scottish Church, however, there was no such rushing into a false position, either through gratitude or through servility. For the first seven years of its existence the Church was free from establishment, and in the course of those years it learned valuable lessons both as to the advantages of self-government, and as to the disposition of the civil power to encroach upon its proper domain. Accordingly when the Church in 1567 accepted establishment, it was on the distinct footing, as it believed, that its spiritual jurisdiction remained untouched. The Act expressly declared: "There be no other jurisdiction ecclesiastical acknowledged within this realm other than that which is and shall be within the same kirk or that flows

therefrom;" words which have no meaning unless intended to exclude the civil power from claiming jurisdiction in matters spiritual. How in after years the bargain was kept, and how far the Church reaped advantage from the alliance, are matters written broadly over three centuries. The story is one of resolute defence of its liberties, when the Church was at its best, and of sycophantic submission, when the Church was at its worst; but in either case it is a story of persistent effort on the part of the State to impose its will upon the Church's action in matters ecclesiastical.

A Test Case.—And at length, in connection with the passing of the Veto Act, a test case was raised. The issue deliberately faced, and argued out to the uttermost, was a distinct issue. The Courts of law nakedly, even offensively, declared that the action of the Church was incompetent, that it had no independent jurisdiction, that whatever jurisdiction it had was a grant from the State, and was limited by the extent of that grant, and that its ministers, in virtue of their sharing in the benefits of a State establishment, were State functionaries, bound to carry into effect in the discharge of their spiritual functions the decrees of the Courts of law, however opposed these decrees might be to their own convictions of what the law of Christ required. Accordingly the question presented itself clear and sharp—Now that State connection is authoritatively declared to involve State control, will the Church continue to accept establishment on these terms? We know what was the answer given by 474 of the most trusted and venerated ministers of the Church, and by all her missionaries abroad; and here to-night, after fifty-seven years have come and gone, we are prepared to say with one voice that the noblest act in their lives of devoted service was when they renounced status, manse, and emolument, that they might be loyal to Christ as sole King within His Church, and faithful to the liberties of His Christian

people. It has been the weakness of our great historians, from Gibbon onwards, that in looking into the play of motives they fail to take account of the spiritual forces at work. But as regards the Disruption, it would be hard for anyone to explain it without tracing the sacrifices then made to the revived spiritual life of the country. Had the question been started a generation earlier, the answer would have been acquiescence. We entirely sympathise in Lord Jeffrey's exclamation, "I am proud of my country," but when we think of hundreds of educated men with family responsibilities deliberating the matter for months in their quiet country manses, and coming to the conclusion to sacrifice their earthly all for Christ's sake, we see more than Scottish heroism ; we see the power of the Spirit of God. It was the manifestation, the crowning manifestation, of the life which had been steadily strengthening in the heart of the Church during the previous forty years. And, let me add, our fathers were led under this guidance to take a step of far-reaching significance. The Disruption, I venture to call the closing of the last chapter but one in the history of the old relation between Church and State in Scotland. Meantime, the story forming the last chapter is running on, marked by such incidents as the Patronage Act of 1874, the appearance of a succession of proposed bills in the interests of spiritual independence, and the frettings of the Church against the Act of 1693 anent formula. Whether the close of the chapter be near or still distant, one thing is satisfactory, that the pointer sends on the eye towards Freedom.

Spirit of Unity.—Another feature in Church life through the century has been the growth of the spirit of unity. To a considerable extent this is due to the broadening out of men's minds to realise the greatness of the Church's mission. The progress of invention has had to do with this. Our telegraphs and cables, and great steamships and railways,

with the facilities for communication and travel which they afford, have made the world a very different thing to us from what it was to our forefathers. Time and space have been to a great extent annihilated; the most distant lands are brought to our doors. We no longer think of millions of far-distant heathen; we think of millions of men and women whom we govern, or with whom we have close diplomatic connection, or with whom we do trade and commerce, or whose manners and customs are familiar to us, and whose prosperity or calamity calls forth our interest or our sympathy. Those vast territories are no longer a kind of dim, mysterious, trackless Sahara to us; we think of their cities and towns and sea-coasts and river banks as peopled with immortal beings, just as ours are at home; only, they know not the Gospel which has brought light and gladness to us. Accordingly, our range of Christian interest has vastly widened; the hair-splittings and provincial feuds which seemed so important when Scotland was our world are judged by a new standard; and with glowing hearts we feel that the sooner we cease to turn mole-hills into mountains, and academic distinctions into impassable barriers, and unite our energies in the common endeavour to bring those territories under the sway of Christ, the sooner will the Church address herself worthily to the task assigned her by the Risen Lord. And, similarly, in regard to the necessities of the home field, the more a sense of its urgency takes hold of men's minds, the more the need is felt for united action. Hence the number of undenominational societies that are at work, carrying on various departments of service which properly belong to the Church as such, but which, because of its divided condition, it cannot overtake. All too well the adversary has known how to act upon the motto—divide and conquer—and the sad amount of carelessness which we deplore is to a large extent due to the want of organised and systematic effort on a comprehensive scale.

Earnest men and women are at work here, there, and everywhere, but it is a kind of guerilla warfare that is carried on, not a strong, because united, mastering of the situation.

An Old Truth.—And in all this, experience has just been teaching an old truth, lying patent on the face of the New Testament, that if the world is to believe that the Father sent the Son to save, Christ's people must manifest the spirit of love and unity. So long as the Church exhibits the aspect of a number of jealous and jarring sects, straining out doctrinal gnats while swallowing the camel of discord, theologians may protest as they please that there is a secret underlying unity, but the world will judge by what it sees. Only as the cardinal feature of Christ's kingdom receives its place of supremacy will the Church put on beauty and strength, for then only is true expression given to its hidden life. Hence, with the growth of spiritual life through the century, there has grown an instinctive sense of the duty and wisdom of annulling divisions. As far back as 1820 the Burghers and Anti-Burghers are found closing their ranks. In 1847, the happy union was formed between the Secession and Relief Churches, which has made the United Presbyterian Church the powerful and prosperous Church it is to-day. On 1st June, 1852, our Free Church received into union an offshoot of the Secession known as "The Original Seceders," and in 1876 we joined hands with a Church whose separate history dates from the Revolution settlement in 1688—the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Some of us, too, remember well the enthusiasm which pervaded this House on Thursday, 28th May, 1863, when, in reply to a communication from the United Presbyterian Synod proposing to meet in conference regarding union, the motion of Dr. Robert Buchanan, resolving that a committee be appointed to confer, was unanimously carried. Those who heard them will never forget the noble speeches made that day, among

others by Dr. Buchanan, Dr. Charles Brown, Dr. Guthrie, Sir Henry Moncreiff, Dr. Begg, and Dr. Candlish. I remember how the manly figure of Dr. Begg seemed to dilate as he made the walls echo to these words: "It was reckoned a grand thing to see the army of France and the solid squares of Britain fighting together on a common field after they had so long fought against each other, and it would be a glorious thing, after all our battles—it would be a grand thing—if we could now lay down our arms in so far as our mutual contests are concerned, but be prepared, in the full panoply of truth, and terrible as an army with banners, to carry battle against the common foe. It would fill the hearts of thousands with ecstacy and delight; and now that unions have been formed among Presbyterians of distant lands, I agree with those who think that . . . union upon a right basis ought to be aimed at, both on the ground of duty and expediency." But, then, what as to the basis? As to that, the wisest remark made in the course of the discussion came from Dr. Gibson. Here are his words: "Well, sir, I will just say that if these gentlemen will take the Westminster Standards, so far as principle is concerned, I have no objection at all to enter into union." Unfortunately, a different line was adopted; and the joint committee entered on the *mare magnum* of constructing what would practically have been new standards; and in time, as we know, the proposal to unite had sorrowfully to be dropped. But in the singularly pathetic speech in which Dr. Candlish moved to that effect, he used these words: "Our prayer will be for the speedy revival of the union movement. I do not expect to see it. I do not expect my beloved brother, Dr. Buchanan, to see it. I am no prophet; but although I may not live to see it, I do venture to predict that you will not all be in your graves before that day comes. Sir, we cannot stem the tide of Christian opinion and Christian feeling. That tide of

Christian opinion and Christian feeling will grow, and swell, and accumulate till every barrier shall be thrown down, and all shall be of one mind to unite in the Lord."

A Memorable Decision.—These words, spoken twenty-seven years ago, have been realised in the memorable decision of Thursday last in this Assembly, and it is interesting to note that while the prophecy fulfilled was Dr. Candlish's, the plan followed was Dr. Gibson's—so that the two parties of a generation ago are also being united. We were told, indeed, last night* that the united Church will be "a congeries of open questions;" but the sounding appellation is now thirty years out of date. Possibly the Right Rev. Moderator is not aware that the proposal of union on the basis of "open questions" was abandoned a generation ago. We are now uniting on the Standards; and not a single question will be open in the united Church which has not been an open question in the Free Church, and open also, for that matter, in the Established Church. And this is one reason for hope in regard to the comprehensive union which many of us have at heart; for I believe that our old Standards, already common to us all, will be the meeting-ground on which all the true sons of Presbyterianism will in the long run unite. Nor need we doubt that the spirit of brotherhood and unity which has effected so much will realise, in God's good time, this further triumph. The leaven is spreading, and in time "the three measures of meal" will be leavened. Union is not a thing to be forced; but gradually the spirit of Christianity will assert its power, and those who are one in faith will increasingly become one in feeling, and ultimately one in fellowship. Then, and not till then, will the Church in Scotland rise to the height of its great destiny as an instrument in Christ's hand for the evangelisation of the world. And here I must offer one more correction in reply

* Closing Address of the Moderator of the Established Church Assembly.

to the reference made to the Free Church last night. It was said, "We do not forget, and I hope the people of Scotland will not forget, that our oft-repeated offer to seek in friendly conference for an equitable basis of union was deliberately rejected." No; we do not forget. We painfully remember that the latest proposal for conference carried on its forefront this stipulation, that the one point of difference between us and the Established Church was not to be open to discussion. In such circumstances conference with a view to an equitable basis of union would have been the merest trifling. It looked as if the door had been for a moment opened, in order the more vigorously to slam it in our faces; and, of course, the so-called offer was declined. If, however, conference should be proposed untrammelled by so ridiculous a restriction; if with mutual trust in one another's motives, and respect for one another's convictions, we met to consult as to how division should be healed, and the cause and kingdom of our one Lord advanced; if instead of cannonading one another across High Street we gathered in singleness of aim, as lovers of one country, heirs of one heritage, trustees of one mission, servants of one King, around the feet of our common Master, to learn His will—might we not expect that, under His gracious guidance a worthy solution would be found of the question which has so long engendered alienation and strife, and weakened our Christian influence upon the world?

Improved Worship.—Another marked feature in the Church life of the century has been the increasing attention paid to the details of public worship. This to some extent has arisen from the spread of intelligence and good taste throughout the community, but is also due to the greater importance attached to the element of worship. The time was when the sermon was the one thing of consequence in the Church service; the prayers and praises were simply the

setting in which it was placed. Although the prayers might be a rambling, disconnected repetition of set phrases, and the singing a listless drawl, yet if the sermon was orthodox and earnest, people were content. But now our Christian people feel that they go to the House of God to meet with Him in prayer and to lift up their hearts in praise; and what used to be merely the "preliminary exercises," are now a vital part of the service. With many, indeed, the texture of the sermon is a secondary consideration compared with the character of the devotional parts; and this to some extent accounts, apart from social and other influences, for the preference shown by several for the Anglican service. It is a mistake to sneer at that preference, or to ascribe it to worldly motives alone; our business rather is to take care that our sanctuary service is adapted to the needs and wants of both young and old, so that none may have to complain of the absence of a devotional atmosphere.

Praise.—The part of the service which more especially belongs to our people—the praise—is that which shows the most notable advance. It is not so very long since the custom became extinct—if it is even yet altogether extinct—of reading out each line of a verse, line by line, and singing each separately; and this not in the melodious, impressive style of a Gaelic service—which is a combination of solo and chorus—but so as to break the melody at every line. Then came the introduction, in a more or less dubious and stealthy way, of choirs. Next came a proposal to increase the material of praise by four-and-twenty hymns, a number which did not fail to suggest the fate of as many winged songsters; but in this case the four-and-twenty gradually multiplied until now we have our Hymnary with a selection of 650, and an anthem book besides. Whispers, too, began to grow louder urging the need of instrumental aid. The suggestion was frowned upon and condemned;

but it still lived and gained support; and at length, grudgingly but wisely, liberty of congregational action was allowed.

Ritualism.—Doubtless, in connection with an improved service, as in connection with all advance, risks are run, but these are slight and can be avoided, whereas the gain is great. There are estimable persons who deprecate any departure from former baldness as a perilous step towards Ritualism; but this is to confound things that differ wide as the poles. Those look only on the surface who suppose that the Ritualism which has been eating as a canker into the life of the English Church is merely an imitating of the pomp and splendour of Romish ceremonial. The questions involved relate to matters far more important than the details of ecclesiastical millinery or display. They are far from being merely affairs of vestments—albs, stoles, and chasubles—or matters of outward display—of crosses and banners and altar-cloths—or of marchings, bowings, and kneelings. If they were no more than empty ornament, all men of sense would regard with contempt the importance attached to them. But they are much more. They are the outward insignia by which doctrinal views are expressed—the symbols which fitly belong to the phase of religious thought which underlies them. Like the more pronounced ritual of Rome, they speak of earthly priests, earthly sacrifices, and outward rites, as coming between Christ and the soul—of salvation mediated through other hands than those of the Divine High Priest who has passed into the heavens. That is the root-principle which gives meaning and cohesion to the wide system of details—a principle to be strenuously resisted; and everything essentially related to it—everything that contributes to embody before the eye the idea of a human priest offering a propitiatory sacrifice over a church altar, or of his interposing, as by means of the

confessional, between a sinner and the living Christ, is to be condemned as ministering to falsehood and superstition. But surely the improvement of scriptural forms of worship, with a view to the quickening and developing of devotional feeling, is something very different. In fact, it is the opposite of ritualistic, for it emphasises the truth that all God's worshippers are priests to Him, called on to offer up sacrifices of thanksgiving ever more worthy, alike in spirit and expression, of Him who is approached.

Excess to be Guarded Against.—At the same time, excess even in this direction has to be guarded against. Whatever in the outward forms of worship, or in the manner of performing them, tends to fix the attention of worshippers upon itself, thereby withdrawing their thoughts from what is real and essential in God's worship, is to be deprecated. But it is expediency rather than principle that must be our guide as to this, for no rigid rule can be laid down. It is not possible to say—*e.g.*, when the Church architecture is too imposing, or the demeanour of minister and people too ostentatiously reverential, or the music too rich or refined; because much depends on the natural temperament and taste, as well as on the early training and habits, of different individuals. What seems an excessive degree of ceremonial to one will look like bald simplicity to another; and things which powerfully strike us and absorb attention on a first sight soon come to be familiar and unnoticed. The law of mutual consideration ought, therefore to be our guide: and the error to be avoided is that of unduly magnifying, either on one side or another, things in themselves indifferent. The one essential matter is that we draw near to Him who is Spirit in spirit and truth; and if the outward changes which may be proposed have a regard to this supreme end, there will not fail to be also a regard for the things which make for peace, and whereby we may edify one another.

Christian Liberality.—In addition to the three features of Church life now referred to—assertion of freedom, desire for union, and attention to the manner of worship—a fourth has to be added, marked increase in Christian liberality. On this, however, I do not dwell, having drawn your thoughts to it on a former day. Nor need I dwell in any detail on the other branch of my subject—the work of the Church—after so much has been said, and so forcibly said, in connection with the various reports submitted. These have all been gratifying ; and other Churches tell equally of progress. Accordingly, we shall enter on the work of the new century from a very different starting-point, and under the impulse of very different feelings from those which characterised the beginnings of the old.

Foreign Missions.—Thus as to work abroad, how does 1900 compare with 1800? A hundred years ago the Protestant Churches, we are told, had just six missionary organisations, 50 missionaries in the field, and a mission income of £10,000. Now, instead of 6, the Churches have 365 organisations ; instead of 50 missionaries, 10,500 are at work abroad ; and the income of £10,000 has expanded into about three millions. And results have been in proportion. A hundred years ago, not a solitary convert from the dark races had been ordained to preach the Gospel to his countrymen ; now there are upwards of 4000 ordained natives. A small band of about 100 native Christian workers has grown into a host of 68,000, and the 10,000 native communicants at the opening of the century have increased to a million and a-half. It is true, we have still to speak of the day of small things, because of the hundreds of millions who yet know not the name of Christ : still we are not to shut our eyes to a progress that has been both marked and continuous. We rejoice especially in the fact that ordained native pastors and unordained but trained native workers

form together a growing host of some 72,000 persons, for to them we may look for the self-propagation and consequent self-support of the native Churches. May the spirit of Pentecost descend upon them all in rich effusion!

Home Work.—In regard to our Christian work at home, I shall refer to one matter only. We were not a little startled when Dr. Howie put nakedly before us the appalling fact that in this small and highly privileged land of Scotland there were no fewer than one million six hundred thousand persons living in open indifference to Christian ordinances. If that be so, in spite of all our churches, missions, and Christian agencies, the fact is one to haunt our thoughts by day and our dreams by night. And while the responsibility for this state of things lies at the door of every one of us, I am profoundly convinced that one main cause accounting for it is, that a sense of personal responsibility as to furthering the advance of Christ's kingdom is but feebly felt by the great body of our Christian people. In the ordinary social intercourse of daily life constant opportunities lie to our hands of manifesting the spirit of Christ, and of influencing Christwards those with whom we mingle; but too often those who profess to believe the great facts of God's love and Christ's salvation and man's urgent need, convey the impression, so far as others can judge from their words and actions, that these are simply pulpit doctrines, not life-guiding, life-inspiring realities. As a matter of theory, we are getting past the old priestly idea that the work of the Church is to be done by its office-bearers; but the influence of the noxious error is by no means dead. The old phrases which described people as "sitting under" this or that minister, and as being "hearers" in such or such a church, are still true to life in the case of many in all our churches. They sit, and hear, and go away, and there the open owning of Christ

ends for a week. Only the dimmest sense of responsibility towards others haunts their minds, and the spectre is not hard to lay. But what a poor idea of surrender and allegiance to Christ is here! The assembling of a number of persons for joint worship does not constitute a Church, but only a meeting; nor does the orderly arrangement of offices and appointment of office-bearers constitute a Church, but only an organisation. A Church, to be worthy of the name ought to be a body of Christians, all of them alive with impulse, thoughtfully considering their opportunities and duties, and engaging their energies and influence, whatever be the sphere in which they move, in the service of their one Lord. Christ, it is true, has given pastors and teachers to His Church, but for what purpose? The passage in Ephesians which reads, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ," is an unfortunate mistranslation. The apostle's words are—"for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." That is to say, in Presbyterian phraseology, Christ has given His Church ministers, elders, deacons. Why? That they should carry on the work of the Church? No. That they should bear the whole responsibility? No; but that they should train and stimulate all their fellow-members to healthful Christian activity—should make them increasingly efficient in the work of ministering blessing to others, and thus also in the building up of the body of Christ.

Personal Responsibility.—According to this teaching, the responsibility for advancing Christ's Kingdom lies primarily and directly on the members of Christ's Church. And that duty is to be construed in no narrow spirit; the word "ministering," or serving, is wide as human life. The opportunities for Christian activity come meeting men and women every morning they rise, every day they live. The

door for helping others is never closed. Religion touches human life on all its sides, and every side of life may in turn be used for the manifesting of Christ's spirit. Indeed, it is when the Spirit of Christ is seen and felt as present and breathing through the insignificant details of life that the effect is greatest. Let none suppose that Christian service is limited to the recognised methods of Church work. We must be done with our conventional ideas on this subject. The outstanding feature in our Divine Master's life was not the multitude of His synagogue services, but His radiating out help and healing and comfort and knowledge of His Father's heart wherever He moved among men. There was no aloofness on His part, nor any conventional tones and phrases. Whether He was in the house, or in the fishing boat, or on the mountain slope, or among suffering crowds, all knew that there was One seeking their good, and ready to do them kindness. And it was in this way chiefly He revealed God—revealed the longing pity which broods over us in our sorrow and sin ; and thus, too, it was He opened human hearts for the reception of His higher message of a Divine life and fellowship. His human, helpful brother-love was the ladder up which He led men to the recognition of the love of God. Hence, those are but poor imitators of Christ who suppose that their services and sacrifices may be confined to sending out others to do His work; and we should not have had our million and a-half of careless people in Scotland to-day if this had been adequately realised in the past. If we would have eyes opened to the reality of the love of God, that love must be mirrored to them in the gentleness, the kindness, the solicitude on their behalf, of the millions who know that love. If these millions would breathe out more of the spirit of the Son of Man, then should we see those around us, now steeped in indifference, made sons of God.

Function of Office-Bearers. — And what then is our function as office-bearers? It is the "perfecting" of those under our care in this work of ministering. The Apostle's word is a suggestive one. It means the putting right of what has been injured or broken, such as the setting of a dislocated joint, or the mending of a fisher's net. It thus points to the setting right or completing of what may be wrong or defective in the character or work of our people so that they may be more efficient for service. In all our congregations there are men and women, old and young, who might be a power for Christ, if through the power of sympathy and companionship—as Christ himself trained the Twelve—they were getting inspiration and guidance from those more experienced. This essential element of success has been to a great extent overlooked. In every profession, and for every other work, the need of training is recognised. We begin in ignorance and gradually advance through mistakes and failures to experience and skill. But the Church has largely proceeded on the idea that it is enough to invite and exhort to work for Christ, forgetting that delicate tact and wisdom and long-bearing patience are needed if the desired results are to be gained. Hence many who began to run well have been hopelessly hindered. Under the impulse of earnest feeling they made a start, but the work was strange to them; they soon, perhaps, met with disagreeable experiences or frustrated efforts; they grew disheartened, could see no good from their efforts; enthusiasm died down; and in spite of an occasional spur from the pulpit, the work was either abandoned or else was henceforth done in the spirit of routine and with a grudge. Equipment for Christian work does not come by instinct. Even as regards the wise use of the social influence and social intercourse open to every follower of Christ, how much harm has been wrought by well-meant utterances which have been blunt and hard, and by actions more petulant than persuasive? There is

a wide field here, accordingly, for our office-bearers, and one calling for sedulous care. It is infirmary work we are set to do, and it will little avail to take an occasional walk through our several wards, still less to dispatch our communion cards by post or messenger. Nay, in this time of stir and energy, when the beat of the pulse is quick and men hurry with intent faces along our streets, there is need that the disciples of Christ bestir themselves, that in the growing years of the new century the work which is alone of real and abiding value—the carrying forward of our Divine Redeemer's saving aim—may advance with growing power to ever greater triumphs.

Parting Words.—Fathers and Brethren, we now must separate in the same great Name in which we met. It may be that this will be to some of us our last meeting in General Assembly, but when men speak of it as the last Free Church General Assembly, I have no sympathy with the suggestion. We can understand that our United Presbyterian brethren ended their happy and useful Synodical gatherings with a certain sadness, because of the severing of old associations, but for our part, we have no cause for even a trace of sadness; beyond that which is incidental to our separating after a most harmonious and memorable meeting. We look forward to an enlarged building, to an enlarged Assembly, to enlarged fellowship, and to enlarged opportunities for service; and why then should we have other feelings than those of gladness and praise? Through God's goodness our Free Church has had a great past—a past which, not only forms the outstanding feature in the Scottish history of the closing century, but has stamped its impress on the Christian character of Scotland to a degree which will continue to tell powerfully for good on all succeeding generations. But great as has been our past, we look forward with devout confidence to a still greater future. We believe that He who has

led us hitherto, and has given us to see a consummation which fathers of the Church longed and laboured to see, who has also led the sons of the Erskines and of Gillespie, and advanced them from small beginnings into a great united and fruitful Church, will not fail to bless still more abundantly His faithful people, when, in accordance with His intercessory prayer, they close their divided ranks, in order to devote their united strength to the ceaseless conflict with evil, and the spread of His glorious Gospel throughout all lands.

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